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RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

"We must open wider the doors of opportunity....
for the good of our country and all our people"
President Eisenhower



A REPORT ON THE WORKING CONFERENCE
Washington, D. C., July 11-12, 1956

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The work conference on the Rural Development Program, July 11 and 12 in Washington, brought together representatives of eight States and the Federal Government to discuss organization and guidelines for effective operation of the program during 1956-57.

The conferees suggested techniques of work and ideas, based on experience gained in State rural community improvement activity and in pilot counties. They did not try to formulate "rules" or mandatory methods of operating State programs. New services and aid that Federal agencies will use to support State Rural Development Programs were also described.

At the close of the meeting, Under Secretary of Agriculture True D. Morse observed, "The conference was extremely productive. It brought out ideas and information that area and community leaders can put to excellent use. Speaking from experience, the leaders told how great results are being achieved in underdeveloped rural areas. They recorded the successful methods that get results."

Those attending the meeting included: Representatives of civic and business groups sponsoring community development in Mississippi, West Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Georgia, Minnesota, Arkansas, and North Carolina; Deans of Agriculture, Directors of Extension, and other Extension personnel in these representative States; representatives of the Departments of Commerce; Labor; Interior; Health, Education, and Welfare; and Agriculture; the President's Council of Economic Advisers; and the Farm Credit Administration.

Progress in the Rural Development Program

In opening the working conference, Under Secretary Morse described progress in the Rural Development Program during the past year. Almost half the 48 States have organized to begin county programs or have already started work (including resource surveys, intensive farm-home education, industrial development, vocational training). Eighteen States have set up Rural Development Committees to select pilot counties and help them get under way.

Address inquiries to Office of Information, U. S. Department of Agriculture,
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The program had its origin in President Eisenhower's January 1954 message on agriculture to the Congress. After more than a year of study on a nation-wide basis, recommendations were made by Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson to "open wider the door of opportunity," as the President said, for farm families in low-income areas. Secretary Benson recommended that about 50 counties in these areas should serve as demonstration or pilot counties. Experience with a variety of problems and developmental techniques would be gained and evaluated for the future.

A Rural Development Program in a typical county would consist of:

1. Intensive educational work to improve farm and home management on small farms.
2. Additional technical aid to help small farmers manage their soil, timber, and water resources.
3. Adequate credit for efficient farming.
4. Expansion of industry and business opportunity in the county and trade area.
5. More assistance to help people obtain off-the-farm employment in the area.
6. Changes in vocational training and other educational programs to help young people gain skills in different trades.
7. Improvement in county facilities -- roads, public buildings, hospitals, and sanitation.
8. Leadership of farm, business, civic, and church groups in the county, with government agencies providing support and technical aid.

In June 1955 a planning conference in Memphis, Tennessee, of State agricultural leaders and Federal representatives outlined practical organization and administration to coordinate State and Federal activities while maintaining maximum local control and interest.

The Rural Development Program approach is based on these principles:

Progress and success will be obtained largely through the efforts and leadership of people in the local counties and areas. State and Federal agencies stand in a supporting role.

Practical coordination of the services and skills of private groups, local leaders, and government agencies is the key.

Agricultural improvement is important. But a Rural Development Program involves all appropriate services in a county and the development of all resources.

New techniques must be pioneered to reach farm families who do not take advantage of present government and non-government services.

The Lesson of Successful Rural Development

In organizing for a Rural Development Program and determining the best way to operate, State and Federal leaders have been guided in part by the experience of organized community improvement under way in many of the 48 States. This work has brought countless benefits to farm families and American farming areas.

Hundreds of organized rural communities in the Nation now participate in programs of community improvement, sponsored on an area basis by development associations and councils (made up of farm and business people and other area leaders), major businesses, and the State Extension Service, and other agricultural agencies.

Attending the working session were representatives of several groups sponsoring this kind of rural community development. Experience they have had in giving leadership to community development within their States and areas serves as an important guide to others moving forward with rural development programs. The following practical suggestions were made during the conference:

1. Bring farm, town, business, and professional people into the program from the start. They can contribute needed skills in planning and organization, and often have important contacts with sources outside the county and area. They know the importance of rural development to the economic health of an area.
2. Trade areas may be the most practical operating units to build and hold the interest and support of leadership.
3. Use organized community groups -- clubs or committees -- to teach better farm and home methods.
4. Contests between organized communities serve to stimulate interest and motivate improvement.
5. Through community clubs, the interest of community leaders, and meetings with area program representatives, local people are made aware of their responsibility for progress. They must believe a program to be their own, not one imposed from outside.
6. Set different goals and develop different projects from time to time -- variety helps stimulate interest.
7. In determining the boundaries of a farm or farm-town community, consult with local people. They know better than outsiders the area of their own community.
8. Successful examples of farm-home improvement and active communities will serve as guides and encouragement to others. Development leaders should spread the word about program accomplishments.
9. The best projects to start with are those that excite general interest. Making a community more attractive, e.g. building community centers, stimulates more enthusiasm than a farm demonstration.

10. Newsletters and other publications issued by county and area leadership help keep up interest within the organized communities.
11. News coverage by the local press, radio, and TV is very important. People and groups like their accomplishments to be recognized.

Not all these techniques can be used in every pilot Rural Development Program county or area. Nevertheless, in reaching into the communities for support and participation, county committees may want to make use of such experiences, adapting them for their own circumstances and programs. Encouraging farm families in communities to take part in county development is both a major problem and a major objective of the Rural Development Program.

Federal Services Reinforce County Programs

In describing special resources available for the Rural Development Program, representatives of Federal Government Departments attending the conference were at pains to point out that this assistance can only supplement the resources and skills of leaders and organizations in States and counties. The conference agreed this principle was vital to successful work in the counties. Federal agencies, cooperating with the States, will provide technical resources and administrative assistance to local people as they guide their own programs forward.

Agencies of the Department of Agriculture with special funds have contacted their State offices and representatives of State agencies concerning allocations. The following USDA agencies have a part in the program:

Federal Extension Service: \$640,000 is available under Section 8 of the amended Smith-Lever Act. Through allocations to State Extension Services, which provide justification, the money will furnish one or more assistant agents to give special assistance in selected disadvantaged farm counties. In some cases these funds may be supplemented by State and local allocations in pilot counties.

Agricultural Research Service: The Household Economics Research Branch has available \$74,300 to develop new research evaluating alternative opportunities of people in low-income rural areas and farm family spending at different income levels, and to prepare guides for family budget plans. Where possible, aid will be given pilot counties in analyzing completed research for use in programs.

The Production Economics Research Branch has available \$330,000 for the following work: Resource surveys in areas containing pilot counties; evaluation of factors leading to economic development; studies in selected areas of the possibilities for increasing incomes through improvements in farming systems for full-time and part-time farmers and improved use of manpower; studies of the size of farm, capital and credit requirements of efficient farming systems by type-of-farming areas; studies of credit, land ownership practices, and physical resources; national and regional studies of production problems of small farms. Most of this ARS research will be carried out in cooperation with the experiment stations in States having rural development programs.

Agricultural Marketing Service: The Marketing Research Division has available \$25,000 to develop guides for locating processing plants and other marketing services in low-income farm areas; to appraise potential markets for farm products from these areas; to evaluate factors that promote small businesses in them, and

to counsel with specialists working in pilot counties. Farm Population and Rural Life Branch has \$125,000 to conduct special field studies of rural population manpower in these areas; educational facilities; use of health facilities; and social security. State Experiment Stations will also contribute funds and personnel to these cooperative studies.

Soil Conservation Service: An appropriation of \$477,000 is available for direct technical aid in most pilot counties. This will provide one full-time and one part-time SCS technician in about 50 counties to aid in appraising agricultural potential in the area and to assist farm families and communities in soil and water resource management for sustained economic production.

Farmers Home Administration: Received increased funds for farm ownership, and production and subsistence loans and an increase in administrative money. If there is a demonstrated need for FHA credit in a pilot county, the agency will make loan funds and personnel available. Amendments to the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act, still before the Congress, would increase FHA authority to refinance farmers' debts and provide new authority to make loans to operate and develop part-time farms. This would have important effects in many Rural Development Program pilot counties.

Forest Service: In carrying out regular programs, the Forest Service is making a special effort to assist pilot counties and areas in promoting better use of forest resources. Technical aid is available in cooperation with State, local, and privately employed foresters. In national forest areas, the timber sales program is helping increase job opportunities. Timber is a major natural resource of many disadvantaged farm areas.

Farm Credit Administration (an independent agency): Production credit associations and national farm loan associations have ample funds to finance farmers who need to adjust their operations and have sound plans for doing so. Officers of these farmer-owned associations should be brought into pilot county planning and direction. They have long experience with farmers' credit and production problems and their counsel will be helpful.

The following Federal Departments and their cooperating State agencies also have responsibility for essential services in the program:

Commerce Department: The Office of Area Development provides technical assistance in business and industry development through contacts with State and area industrial development groups, and information and technical materials. In fiscal 1957, this office has personnel to assist pilot counties in their industry development needs by means of counseling and resource evaluation.

Health, Education, and Welfare: This Department administers grant-in-aid funds contributed to programs of State agencies in the fields of education, health, welfare, and vocational rehabilitation. It is imperative that State Rural Development leaders bring representatives of these State agencies into the program and request special attention to pilot counties. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare will review program needs and progress and encourage State agencies to contribute their important skills to pilot county programs.

Interior: The Bureaus of Indian Affairs; Reclamation; and Fish and Wildlife; and the National Park Service administer programs which may affect projects in some pilot counties. Field representatives of these bureaus are anxious to cooperate to the extent they can be of service. Areas that desire to promote tourist and recreational trade should consider contacting the Interior Department.

Labor: Although this Department received no special funds for planned employment surveys and information and classification work in pilot areas, State and local employment service offices can make a much needed contribution. State offices contain a wealth of technical information which could be utilized in planning county programs; local employment offices can provide technical services (job listing, counseling, registration of applicants, classification) to county committees.

Organizing for Action

In discussing necessary administration for an effective program and closer coordination of group effort, the working conference referred to the Memphis meeting report of June 1955 dealing with organization. Suggestions made in this report form a practical basis for organization, although some variations will arise in adjusting to individual State and county needs, and existing State and county committee structure.

Within a typical pilot county, the Rural Development Committee is made up of representatives of all appropriate groups and agencies, in addition to individuals who might make an important contribution. This committee has a chairman and is divided into various sub-committees (dealing with agricultural development in such major enterprises as dairy, fruit and vegetables, livestock, etc.; industry and business; health and welfare; education; recreation. Major responsibility for decisions concerning the program rests with this group.

Its members represent mainly farm, business, banking, civic, and church organizations and government service agencies in the county. Through broad representation, this committee will be able to coordinate program operations in the county and reach outside the county for help from government and non-government agencies and from businesses and trade area groups.

A secretary to the Rural Development Committee has general operating and leadership responsibility. He might be an assistant county agent (paid with special Extension funds), a representative of another agency in the county, or be paid from private or county funds, or a combination of both.

The county committee, in consultation with the State Rural Development Committee, will normally designate the secretary. He is administratively responsible to his agency; at the same time he works closely with the county committee, other agencies in the county, and the State Rural Development Committee. (This type of organization has long been used in local-initiative community improvement work. One agent, cited during the conference, has the title "Manager, Community Development Foundation." In other cases mentioned, commercial groups or businesses have supplied a farm specialist to serve the agricultural development organization.) New personnel in the county to work on projects under the Rural Development Program will be employees of existing agencies and cooperating organizations and companies.

No matter who occupies the position of secretary to the county committee, commendation for a successful program should go to the committee itself and to its chairman, who are directing the program.

The State Rural Development Committee, organized by the Dean of the Agricultural College in cooperation with other Federal and State agencies and organizations is representative of both agricultural and non-agricultural interests having a major concern with the development of disadvantaged rural areas. It is essential that representatives of farm organizations, education, health, welfare, vocational rehabilitation, employment, and industrial development agencies be participating or advisory members of this committee. Appropriate civic, religious, credit, labor, and press groups might also be represented.

This committee also has a chairman and a secretary. The latter is responsible for coordinating the State program and forwarding activities in the State. The secretary is a representative of whichever agency seems most appropriate to the State Rural Development Committee.

Within the Federal Government, three committees provide a means of coordination and consultation for department and agency representatives.

1. An interdepartmental committee of the Under Secretaries of Commerce; Labor; Health, Education, and Welfare; and Agriculture; an Assistant Secretary of Interior; and a member of the President's Council of Economic Advisers.
2. A working level committee of representatives from the foregoing departments.
3. A committee within the Department of Agriculture of agency heads (or their alternates) concerned in the program and the Governor of the Farm Credit Administration.

As the Rural Development Program gains momentum, these interdepartmental and USDA committees will convene more frequently, to meet the need for coordination, planning, and appraising ideas and suggestions.

The Under Secretary of Agriculture and his office will provide coordination of the program and serve as a clearing center for information.

Unity in a Complex Program

Participants in the working conference remarked on the difficult job of coordinating activities in a program involving so many different agencies and organizations, both government and private. Important methods of gaining unity of purpose and action which were discussed included:

1. Meetings of county, State, and Federal committees. This is the main committee function -- to discuss plans and operations, to arrive at agreement on areas of work. In this connection, the importance of broadly representative committees in States and counties was again noted.

2. Liaison between secretaries of county and State committees will provide a practical method of cooperation and consultation between these committees. On occasion, other members of State and county committees will also need to meet together for a general review of programs.
3. Agencies concerned with pilot county programs will make use of regular channels of communication and administration to further their own responsibilities within States, and also nation-wide.
4. State, Federal, and other publications dealing with the Rural Development Program are extremely important. The Department of Agriculture, through the Rural Development Program News and other periodic reports, will attempt to keep all State and county leaders informed.
5. Members of Congress and State government officials are interested in experience gained and problems encountered in county programs. It is the responsibility of State Rural Development Committees to appropriately inform their Congressional representatives through minutes of meetings and other reports.
6. Additional working conferences in Washington and the various regions, as needed, will provide additional opportunities for consultation between State, national, and county leaders.

County Resource Survey -- A First Step

In demonstration counties taking part in the Rural Development Program, the first step toward project planning is an evaluation of resources and conditions. County committee members will need to see where they stand, where they are starting from in order to determine future progress.

County and area leaders should look to the valuable sources of information and technical assistance which can assist in this complex research job.

Research personnel at the Land-Grant College and other universities in the area may be in a position to provide technical guidance in planning and carrying out a survey of the county situation.

The libraries in these institutions often contain invaluable data on economic and social conditions throughout the State and in individual counties. The 1954 Census of Agriculture provides detailed information on counties in the United States which is available from offices of the Census Bureau.

Within counties, trade areas, and regions, most banking institutions and major businesses keep an up-to-date file of statistical and other information concerning economic conditions and human resources. All this material should be utilized in county resource evaluation, whenever possible.

Measuring Progress

Organizations and agencies with responsibility in the Rural Development Program will need continuing information on county planning, problems encountered, and progress made. In preparing future budgetary and legislative recommendations to the Congress, Federal Government agencies will depend heavily on this information.

It was suggested that periodic reports from pilot counties to State committees and in turn to the office of the Under Secretary of Agriculture should be a regular administrative part of the program. In addition, Federal and State agencies will include information on their participation in the program when preparing regular reports.

This material will be used by both State and Federal committees to make periodic evaluations of the Rural Development Program.

The working group also suggested that it might be feasible to gain the cooperation of a private foundation or research group in carrying out an over-all evaluation of the program on a State and national basis. This approach to determining progress should result in an objective evaluation separate from administrative responsibility.

News About the Program

Keeping the general public informed about progress and objectives in the Rural Development Program is also a primary administrative function. This is especially true with respect to people in areas having pilot counties.

The Office of Information, Department of Agriculture, being centrally located and in the best position to secure information on a broad basis, has primary responsibility.

However, State Rural Development Committees, through agency information and editorial offices, have a real opportunity to gain understanding and support of the program within their States.

It was pointed out that the accuracy and comprehensiveness of USDA public reporting depends on the thoroughness and timeliness of information received from State leaders in the program.

Crucial Groups in Motivating Communities

A main concern of representatives attending the conference was methods of stimulating local private initiative and interest. (At the Memphis meeting last year one of the working groups also centered its attention on this subject.) Unless county and community private organizations give full support to the program, and work to gain its objectives, the efforts of agency personnel will have limited success.

It was pointed out that certain organizations and groups in the counties and areas stand in key positions for the purpose of this program, either because they play a leading role or are especially suited to generating wide support. These "key" organizations and groups should be brought into the program as early as possible:

1. Farm organizations -- They have a vital role to play; without their support and participation, county programs will be severely handicapped.

2. Churches -- Rural ministers have wide contacts and influence with people in the communities. "Religious attitudes provide a dynamic force for community and personal improvement." (Memphis meeting report, page 9)
3. Civic and Service Clubs -- These leaders in the community can generate interest and provide experienced direction.
4. Major businesses, utilities, industries, and financial institutions in the county and area -- They have development and research skills, funds to support programs, and are vitally interested in the economic health of their area. Often they employ agricultural and industry development experts. County Rural Development Committees should call on these experienced people.
5. Industry development council -- In some pilot counties, these councils already exist. They should be represented on the Rural Development Committee.
6. Young people -- the group that will profit most from a successful Rural Development Program are the children and young people. Through the schools and such organizations as 4-H, FFA, and the Scouting program, they should be interested in the county program and permitted to take part. Often the enthusiasm of young people will motivate their parents.
7. Newspapers and Radio-TV Stations -- They should be in on a program from the start. In some instances, it has been a forward-looking and public-spirited editor who has initiated a successful development program.

Congressional Interest in Rural Area Development

Early in the working conference, Congressional committee reports and information releases and summaries were put in the record. This material reflects continuing interest on the part of Congress in rural area economic development and special aid to underemployed farm families.

The Sub-committee on Low-Income Families held extensive hearings in November 1955 on programs to raise standards of living among rural and urban people with insufficient income. These hearings were followed by recommendations early in 1956 for increased credit and on-the-farm education, more industrialization and off-farm job opportunities, and training in industrial skills, to help farm families in disadvantaged areas.

On July 12, Representative Clark W. Thompson, who heads a House Sub-committee studying ways and means to protect and promote the family farm, announced additional hearings of the Sub-committee to receive recommendations from general farm organizations. Previously members of the Sub-committee held hearings in several Southeastern States to study the problems of low-income farmers.

Earlier this session, the House Committee on Banking and Currency reported a bill to give substantial credit, technical and vocational training assistance to economically depressed urban and rural areas. On July 12, the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare reported a similar bill, pointing out that "the percentage of commercial farmers in the low-income category, adjusted for changes in cost of living, has remained nearly constant since 1930."

On many fronts the Nation is moving toward major programs which will bring depressed rural and urban areas into the main stream of American progress.





